

Feminization of the Land in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Fiction

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Résumé: Le roman de Ngugi wa Thiong'o présente dans divers contextes, des traits de ressemblance entre la terre et la femme. Ainsi, cet article se propose de montrer, à travers l'analyse des signes, que la terre comporte des caractères féminins qui vont de l'esthétique à l'éthique, en passant par la vie sociale, dans le contexte de la vie de jeune fille, d'épouse, et de mère. Au moyen de ce travail, nous apprenons que les problèmes liés à la terre doivent se comprendre en faisant référence à la question du genre, tout en mettant l'accent sur les liens affectifs, capitalistes et filiaux entre l'homme et sa terre. Pour Ngugi, la relation entre l'homme et sa terre est une relation d'interdépendance et d'égalité qui le contraint à considérer celle-ci non pas comme un simple moyen de production, mais une partie de lui qui mérite considération particulière.

Mots clés: terre, personnage, vie de femme, exploitation.

Abstract: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels display in different contexts, some traits of likeness between the land and woman. Thus, this article shows, with the application of metaphor, that the land bears some feminine features which range from aesthetics to ethics, in the context of girlhood, wifeness and motherhood. Thanks to this work, we have been able to know that the land related problems should be understood by referring to the gender issues, while putting a focus on the affective, capitalistic, and filial links between man and his land. For Ngugi, the relationship between man and his land is a relation of interdependence and equality constraining him to regard the latter not just as a means of production, but as his counterpart which deserves a specific consideration.

Key words: land, character, womanhood, exploitation.

Introduction

This article is motivated by the assumption that the modern and capitalistic man has lost the cultural elements that constituted the cement of his existence, and his background (Jung, 1964: 85). It has therefore been observed that the contact between man and the land is now reduced to a mere profit-making relationship. This situation is developed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o who seems to establish a man/woman relationship between man and land by using different land-related figures so as to incite the reader's scrutiny.

Our concern in this article is to analyze the literary techniques used by the author to set the similarities between the land and woman. In our position as a second degree reader

(Barthes, 1973: 41), we envision showing that land is a vital entity that provides life, beauty to life, care to life, and to which people owe affection, consideration and acknowledgements. This dissertation also purports to rethink the link between man and the land in a capitalistic society.

The development relies on metaphor backed by the signifier/signified relation (Roland Barthes) and the womanist theory (Alice Walker). The work focuses on the character and is concerned with the similarities between woman and the land. This process relies on the assumption that the novel's characters "may themselves suggest many possible interpretations; they may, according to the preoccupations of each reader, accommodate all kinds of comment -- psychological, psychiatric, religious, or political -- yet their indifference to these 'potentialities' will soon be apparent ..." (Eco, 1989: 152). Besides, the womanist theory is used to examine the relationships between people and the land seen as a woman.

The dissertation comprises three main sections. The first section explores the feminine features of land, the second deals with the exploration of the types of relations between man and the land, and the third section highlights the duties of man towards the land seen as a woman. The next point therefore allows us to study the relation amid land and woman.

1. Land as Representation of the Woman

This point purports to study female characters regarded as signs related to the land, while basing on Philippe Hamon who posits that the character conveys a "signified" to which it provides a particular "meaning" (Hamon, 1977: 125). In Ngugi's novels the similarity between female characters and the land occurs at the biological, emotional and psychological aspects. In *Petals of Blood* for example he describes Abdulla's opinion about Wanja by writing:

Only that for him now, a woman was truly the other world: with its own contours, valleys, rivers, streams, hills, ridges, mountains, sharp turns, steep and slow climbs and descents, and above all, movement of secret springs of life. Which explorer, despite the boasts of men, could claim to have touched every corner of that world and drunk of every corner of that world and drunk of every stream in tours, unexpected turns, or surprises -- so predictable. A woman was a world, the word, the world. (Ngugi, 1977: 315)

In this daring comparison, the author intends to set a connection between woman and the land, which, at the first sight, appear as different specific entities. From the status of difference (human/nature), Ngugi successfully shows that both land and woman have similar aspects. We can therefore sum the above extract with these figures:

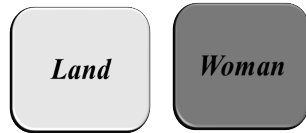


Fig 1: Land and Woman as different specific entities



Fig 2: Land and Woman as similar entities

However, the physical dimension of this similarity gives the following table:

SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
<i>Land Features</i>	<i>Woman Body Parts</i>
- Contours	- Shape
- Mountains	- Buttocks
- Hills, slops	- Breasts
- Valleys	- Sexual organ
- Waters, streams	- Seminal secretion

Fig 3: Signifier/Signified Relationship between Land and Woman

The first figure shows that land and woman are independent entities. Actually, in the second figure, we note that these specific entities are associable. As a result, the land features are seen in the third figure as *signifiers* and the woman body parts as *signified*. Ferdinand de Saussure groups the signifiers in three categories: icon, index and symbol. For example, the name “Wanja” is an indexical signifier which refers to a lady. The description of the lady herself infers that she is an icon. And so, Wanjia appears as the icon (representation) of women in this passage. However, the different geological terms like “contours”, “mountains”, “hills”, “slops”, “valleys”, “waters” and streams” used by the author are known in this context as indexical signs, since they are used to subtly convey women body parts in a process of connotation. Basing on these assumptions, we can deduce that Wanjia is the “symbolic representation” of the “land.”

In a process of connotation, the term “contours”, denoted as something’s shape’s outline, is used for woman’s shape. The word “mountains” refers to the buttocks; the terms “sharp turns,” “steep and slow climbs,” and “descents” are used to focus on the variation of the size and shape of the buttocks. In the same vein, “hills” and “ridges” convey women’s “breasts.” Moreover, the “valley”, denoted as a hollow place where “rivers and streams” are generally found, is the figurative representation of fertility, especially as in *The River Between* Ngugi shows Honia River as provider of life and unity. As a result, the land seen as a woman type, is a provider of life.

Besides, owing to Roland Barthes for whom “[t]o interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it” (Barthes, 1970: 11),^[1] the reader is able to alternate between the denotative and the connotative meanings of words. Thus, the phrase “climbs and descents” which originally conveys landscape, is used to refer to moral and psychological variations common in women and land. A clear illustration is found in the following alternation between beauty and poison in *Petals of Blood* as follows:

How beautiful you are my love
How soft your round eyes are, my honey!
What a pleasant thing you are, Lying by this cedar bush!
But oh, darling,
What poison you carry between your legs! (Ngugi, 1977: 277)

In this song performed by the peasants at Mzigo’s place, there is contrast amid “beautiful” and “poison” which express respectively good and evil. There is metaphor of beauty through the ambiguity between “my love,” “my honey” and “darling” which are affective terms used for beloved people; while the expression “lying by this cedar bush” may convey a specific area. However, in *A Grain of Wheat* the author shows the land as an attractive but destructive thing.

The term “beautiful” conveys both aesthetic and ethic.² In Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s fiction, he compares the beauty of women like Mumbi, Wanja and Guthera to the Gikuyu land which exerts an attractive power on the European settlers and certain local foreigners. Otherwise, Ngugi shows the harmonious landscape through the term “sleeping lions” (Ngugi, 1965: 1) that gives a pleasant vision to the admirer. This beauty of land is also perceptible in this conversation between Chege and Waiyaki about Kameno land:

“‘Yes, it is beautiful’
‘It’s beautiful (...)’” (Ngugi, 1965: 2)

In that conversation, the term “beautiful” expresses the strength of the relationship between the Gikuyu community and their land. Otherwise, this strength is emphasized in *A Grain of Wheat* by Gikonyo who argues, “[i]t’s camphor. Have you ever heard of it? Grows mostly in the high ground in the Aberdares and around Mount Kenya. Very good timber. Why

¹ “*interpréter un texte ce n’est pas lui donner un sens, c’est au contraire dire de quel pluriel il est fait*”

² Beauty, like goodness, resides in the harmony of the natural world, as created by God, and that humans can immediately discern such a beauty (or goodness) by an ‘inward eye’ or ‘moral sense.’ Furthermore, the enjoyment of beauty has a disinterested quality distinct from the desire of possession. (Maryanne, 2005: 14). Maryanne states that “good character is beauty” (Wiredu, 2004: 322)

else do you think that the white people appropriated that land to themselves?”(Ngugi, 1967: 65).

In the above citation, the term “good” also conveys the ethical value which includes generosity, hospitality and sympathy which are associated with the Kikuyu land. These characteristics are responsible for the settle of Mugo, Munira, Abdulla, Karega, Mzigo, Howlands and John Tompson in the Kikuyu land. Njoroge therefore asks, “[a]nd they all left their country to come and rob us acres of what we have?” (Ngugi,1964: 43). He further expresses the generosity of the land by pointing out its availability and its assistance to people with cure, protection, food facilities, to the extent that Waweru’s father says that “everything good and beautiful comes from the soil” (Ngugi, 1977: 89).

Besides, the land remains a remarkable source of evil, inasmuch as it causes crises, and even death in society. These crises include for instance Jacobo/Ngotho, Karanja/Gikonyo, Old Ilmorog/City men, and Matigari/John Boy oppositions in the novels. Additionally, there is antagonism between local owners and such settlers as Howlands, Dr Lynd, and Settler Williams. Here, the femininity may be reduced to girlish (caprices and depravity) or womanish (goodness and maturity) in addition to the common disposition to produce.

The most prominent factors of fertility of the Kikuyu land are the Rift Valley, Mount Kenya and Lake Victoria (Milley and Thoraval, 1980: 142) which appear as the secondary characters in humans, and subsequently factors of fertility. We understand the relevant use of the terms forests, hills, mountains in his books in the plural form^[3] which favours the presence of crops like tea, pyrethrum and sisal crops, which are signs of growth and prosperity so that Guthera exclaims, “so fertile, this land!” (Ngugi, 1987: 41).

In *Weep Not, Child* the author establishes a connection between land and woman by writing, “[t]his is my land,’ Mr Howlands said this as a man would say, this is my woman” (Ngugi, 1964: 129). In fact, for the settler the land is equal to the woman, moreover the shamba seems more profitable to Howlands than Suzannah his wife. Both N’gotho and Howlands are convinced that “land i[wa]s everything” (Ngugi, 1964: 39), since “it is not much that a man can do without a piece of land” (Ngugi, 1964: 39). In the same context, Mumbi is presented in *A Grain of Wheat* as Gikonyo’s source of power, strength, pleasure, joy, money and zeal, especially as “it was her tenderness and knowledge that saved him and

³ For example, in *Weep Not, Child* the author says that “in a country of ridges, such as Kikuyuland, there are many valleys and small hills” (Ngugi, 1964: 7). In *The River Between*, we can consider this sentence, “Behind Kamenyo and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges” (Ngugi, 1965: 1), whereas in *A Grain of Wheat* he specifies, “Nyeri is full of mountains, hills and deep valleys covered with impenetrable forests” (Ngugi, 1967 : 49). In *Petals of Blood*, he uses the term “Donyo Hills” (Ngugi, 1977 : 251) and in *Matigari* there is a mention of “mountains and valleys” (Ngugi, 1987 : 38).

gave life back to him” (Ngugi, 1967: 90). In this same vein, the land is portrayed in Ngugi’s novels as a source of pleasure, power, wellbeing and happiness to Nganga, Jacobo, Howlands, Wariu and Waweru.

In “Motherhood in African Literature and Culture” published in *Comparative Literature and Culture* Remi Akujobi writes:

Motherhood is often defined as an automatic set of feelings and behaviours that is switched on by pregnancy and the birth of a baby. It is an experience that is said to be profoundly shaped by social context and culture. Motherhood is also seen as a moral transformation whereby a woman comes to terms with being different in that she ceases to be an autonomous individual because she is one way or the other attached to another-her baby. (Akujobi, 2011: 2)

The term motherhood hereof is used to focus a deeper facet of womanhood; not a mere capacity to give birth, but to generate and protect life. In this vein Remi Akujobi points in the same work that:

The word procreation or giving birth and nurturing new life whether physically or otherwise has led to a different definitions of the words “feminine”, “maternal”, and “feminine spirituality” in many cultures and religious traditions. Motherhood in some quarters is seen as a sacred and powerful spiritual path for a woman to take. (Akujobi, 2011: 2)

Women are more responsible and participative to life whereas girls have just the dispositions to procreate without been often able to take care of their kids. For example, in *Petals of Blood* Wanja is showed as a lady who was not able to take care of the baby she got from Kimeria in her tender age, due to her immaturity. Contrarily, Mumbi appears as a good mother basing on Alice Walker who defines the mother as: “... a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture (...) and women’s strength (...) committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female (...) traditionally universalist” (Walker, 1983: xi-xii).

The African land is thus portrayed by Ngugi wa Thiong’o as a means of togetherness, promotion of life and promotion of culture. Moreover, it appears that land is like a responsible woman who fulfils several tasks alongside men for the sake of the community. Ula Yvette Taylor therefore states that:

A woman exercised her greatest influence on behalf of the race in her role as wife, mother, and teacher. For them, this did not imply notions of woman’s inferiority to man because woman is man’s equal intellectually. The history of Black female and Black male ideological and relational differences, which extended across class and geographical lines, is a testament that Black women were active and assertive in varying ways. (Taylor, 2000: 114)

Those dimensions of womanhood are well depicted in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s novels where the land is presented as a virtuous and responsible mother. In this view, it provides

people with education, health, and security facilities. For example, in *The River Between* the bush serves as a school to the initiation of Waiyaki. There is also Honia River, a land feature, which provides cure and life to Kameno and Makuyu, two antagonising localities. In addition, during the mau mau uprising, the forest, another land feature, serves as protection to the fighters like a mother can do for her kids. It now convenes to appraise the different types of relationships which may exist between man and the land in the next section.

2. Types of Relationships between Man and the Land

We can scrutinize the connection between the land and humans basing on three aspects: the filial link, the affective relationships and the illegal connections. The filial link involves the notions of family or parental relationship. It is bestowed by nature, ordained by God and thereby nourished by filial and maternal love. No one chooses their own mother; neither can they make choice of their ancestral land. In fact, following the common Gikuyu legend,⁴ the tribal land of the Gikuyu is granted them by Murungu in these words, “[this land I give/hand to you. O man and woman” (Ngugi, 1964: 24; 1965: 2). In addition, the land, which would be ruled permanently by the Agikuyu, is older than all the next generations. Kihika therefore tells his comrades, “Kenya is our mother” (Ngugi, 1967: 78). In this context, land takes the meaning of home, territory or motherland.

The parental relationship between man and land may be either natural or by adoption. Concerning the case of adoption, Karega, Abdulla and Munira are presented as people who are adopted by the village as its true sons although they are foreigners in Ilmorog. Moreover, for having taken care of Matigari during his tribulations, Guthera is designated by the latter as his “mother”. In this context, a mother is someone who cares for people’s life and sympathizes with them in their ordeals.

More to the point, the relation between man and the land can be seen as an affective link. This relation relies on the rule of attraction in physics or coupling in biology, according to which man as *nurture* is generally likely to be associated with *nature* (Ngugi, 1998: 116). On top of that, it is observed that people from less privileged land are generally likely to look forward to settling in most privileged regions. For Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the *marriage* between man and land should be ordained by God or the first owners.

Consequently, the ownership of such a land should be done following the rule of legacy/lineage. However, the illegal settlement of foreigners on local people’s lands is seen as

⁴ Ngugi, 1964: 24; 1965: 2; 1967: 189.

a forced marriage or even adultery. Ngugi highlights this in *Petals of Blood* with the attempts of exploitative relationships between a German and Wanja. Basing on that assumption, it appears that the relationship between the settlers or the social climbers and the land is illogical and is even regarded as a taboo, insofar as the latter is based on materialism and power. On the contrary, the relation between the natives and the Gikuyu land is regarded as logical and legal marriage with the case of Gikonyo and Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat*, and that of Kerega and Wanja in *Petals of Blood*. What is impressing in those two cases is the fact that the two ladies love their partners in spite of the influence of other candidates. Otherwise, the process of marriage symbolizes the ownership by concession seen in the case of Mugo depicted in *A Grain of Wheat* as follows:

Warui, a village elder, wore a new blanket which sharply relieved his wrinkled face and the grey tufts of hair on his head and on his pointed chin. It was he who had given Mugo the present strip of land on which to grow a little food. His own piece had been confiscated by the government while he was in detention. Though Warui liked talking, he had come to respect Mugo's reticence. But today, he looked at Mugo with new interest, curiously even. (Ngugi, 1967: 4)

If the land may be owned in the peasants' milieu by the law of nature or by the means of concession, in the materialist milieu it is rather handover from one person to another owing to the materialistic or political powers. There is a matter of exploitation or violation of the natural rules about landownership. The readings show that apart from the settlers, only rich Africans such Jacobo, Gikonyo and Waweru are able to own land. In such a situation there is a contrariety in proprietorship to the extent that the natives have to buy lands from foreigners. The overall remark from these examples is that, in a materialistic world, land can be acquired by the means of money or other corrupt materials. To corroborate that idea, we may resort to Mr Howlands for whom, "[t]he farm was the woman whom he had wooed and conquered" (Ngugi, 1964: 41). This conception of landownership is perceptible in the behaviour of some black Kenyans such as Jacobo, Ezekiel Waweru and their likes, whose supposed properties have been bought from their poor African brothers.

For Njoroge, except the ownership by the means of legacy and membership, all the other ways of acquiring the local lands are seen as robbery; therefore he stipulates that the settlers "are robbers" (Ngugi, 1964: 43). Kiarie sees the robbery as a two-step process: the advent of Christianity and the use of violence, as he argues that "the Bible paved the way for the sword" (Ngugi, 1964: 57). Such ways of accessing the land is seen as adultery and rape, since the land originally belonged to another person. The adulterous and unfaithful attitude of

the materialists in the context of landownership is also evidenced through the intercourse between Margery Thompson and Dr Van Dyke in *A Grain of Wheat*.

For Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, they associate such behaviour with the bourgeoisie by arguing that “bourgeois, unhappy to have their proletarians’ wives and daughters on their disposal, find it pleasant to deceive one another, so not to talk about prostitution” (Marx and Engels, 1983: 51, translation mine).^[5] Indeed, the settlement of the Europeans in Africa is perceived as an act of adultery because according to Kamau, “Black people have their land in the country of Black people. White men have their land in their own country. It is simple. I think it was God’s plan” (Ngugi, 1964: 43).

In that relation the only expectation is the profit since “for the bourgeois, his wife is nothing than an instrument of production” (Marx and Angel, 1983: 50, translation mine).^[6] Ngugi depicts the point through the case of Howlands who pays more attention to his shamba than his wife Suzannah. In the preface to *Weep Not, Child* Ime Ikiddeh posits that “Mr Howlands has forsaken everything including his country and family to cultivate the wild land he has conquered” because “it is the only thing in the world that matters to him now” (Ngugi, 1964: x). Actually, “his one pleasure was in contemplating and planning the land to which he has now given all his life. Suzannah was left alone” (Ngugi, 1964: 31).

On top of that, sexual exploitation, which according to Kathleen Canning, is the primary form of women’s oppression, remains a recurrent fact in the midst of the bourgeois class (Canning, 2006: 5). Thus, in *Matigari*, the superintendent who detained Guthera’s father, constrains her to sleep with him by telling her, “you are carrying your father’s life between your legs” (Ngugi, 1987: 35). Such a form of exploitation and abuse is often due to certain social constraints such as poverty, depression or menace. For example, in “The Scandal of the Whorearchy: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi” Anne McClintock reveals that Nairobi became a place of prostitution as she puts, “at about the same time in Kenya, toward the end of the nineteenth century, prostitution emerged as an identifiable form of women’s work. Prostitution was born in the collision of natural catastrophe and empire” (McClintock, 1991: 93). Such a dishonourable act is observed in the management of land which is often snatched off by needy proprietors like the Ilmorog villagers who sell their lands who were impelled to sell their plots of land to the outsiders.

⁵ «bourgeois, non contents d’avoir à leur disposition les femmes et les filles de leurs prolétaires, sans parler de la prostitution officielle, trouvent un plaisir singulier à se cocufier mutuellement »

⁶ «Pour le bourgeois, sa femme n’est rien qu’un instrument de production»

This symbolizes the violation of land acquisition rights by the powerful entities that often constrain people to give up their lands to acquire their freedom. For example, during the emergency period in colonial Kenya, the colonizer often detained Kikuyu people to take their lands away. For example, in *A Grain of Wheat*, Gikonyo's detention caused the parallel loss of his lands his darling Mumbi that were respectively taken away by the settler and Karanja. His aftermath disgust and challenge are justified by the fact that he supposes that "there is nothing so painful as finding that a friend, or a man you always trusted, has betrayed you" (Ngugi, 1967: 106).

If the above details emphasize on the different types of relationship which may exist between man and land, it appears that humans' life is intrinsically bound to a specific area. Facing its role in people's lives, we infer that the latter must assume their responsibilities vis-à-vis the land seen as mother, love partner or a third in the community. The following section therefore provides useful information.

3. Man's Duties towards His Land Seen as a Woman

Unlike some traditional or religious practices and the bourgeoisie's philosophy according to which the woman is a mere system of production, the feminist writers advocate that women and men must have the same rights. Pearl Cleage therefore states that "women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities -- intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic" (Cleage, 1993: 12). As for the African feminist Alice Walker, African women and men should come together and work for the development of the continent (Walker, 1983: xi). In the same view, land must occupy a considerable place in the development of Africa inasmuch as before their dispossession, "the native was grazing cattle, dreaming of warriorship, of making the soil yield to the power of his hands, slowly through a mixture of magic and work bending nature's laws to his collective will and intensions" (Ngugi, 1977: 88). Those will and intensions are translated by work.

As a consequence, the contemporary people must acknowledge the value of land in order to be able to work it. To that extent, the author advocates coming back to the ancestral through the character of Kiarie who explains to his friend Ngotho, "it was better to give up the attempt and be content with knowing the land you live in, and the people who lived near you" (Ngugi, 1964: 6). As far as Ngotho, Chege and Nyankinyua are concerned, they give credit to teaching the young generation about the origin and value of the tribal lands in order to avoid landownership problems. In this context, the homecoming of African soldiers, who fought in World War 2, evoked in *Weep Not, Child*, symbolizes reconciliation and unity between man

and his land woman as way of abiding by the rule of nature. We understand that life would be just boredom without a permanent contact with the land, since it is the cement of human's existence.

In addition to that, Ngugi wants to show that land likewise women must not be oppressed or exploited for selfish interests. He portrays this aspect through the depiction of the depletion of nature by modernisation (production of coal and construction of trans-Africa road) and the overuse of the Gikuyu land through the creation of industrial plantations by the colonists and the use of chemical fertilizers which later damages the ground. These aggressions perpetrated against the land are comparable with girl Muthoni's circumcision in *The River Between* and the rape of Dr Lynd in *A Grain of Wheat*.

Besides, people must understand that women as delicate, useful and valuable humans must be regarded with much love and care. These responsibilities involve men seen as husbands, children or neighbours. Referring to the love link between man and the land, in the context of couple relationship, it would be exclusively based on love. Such a landscape of love is thoroughly developed by the author through fair love affairs involving Gikonyo and Mumbi, and between Karega and Wanja.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the author points out this feeling through Gikonyo's desire to carve a stool for Mumbi after his detention. He presents this as a high symbol of love, fidelity and reconciliation. Indeed, Gikonyo's project is to reshape his wife in a better framework. He says "I'll change the woman's figure. I shall carve a woman big – big with child" (Ngugi, 1967: 213). This situation shows the irresistible power of love that leads people to make positive image to the beloved ones regardless of their defaults and limits. In the same way, people must love their lands by regarding them differently and more positively despite their appearance, while regarding them as a good place with the hope to get them transformed by the means of labour.

Labour appears in this context as the representation of the coitus which is responsible for reproduction and growth which ensure the perpetuation the relationship. In fact, reproduction is the most important thing in African marriage, inasmuch as it makes the woman assert herself, her womanhood and motherhood. Therefore, in Ngugi's novels, Mumbi, who is shown as a mother, is more loved by her husband even though all the others like Wanja and Guthera are involved love affairs. Labour is regarded by the libertarians as the only means by which people should confirm and consolidate the ownership of a land, since for them "the land belongs to those who work it" (Tanya, n.d.: 2). Labour also makes the pride of the proprietor and enhances his loyalty to the land. Indeed, the poignant image of

loyalty is Ngogho whose engagement in the strike involves his relation to the land, because for him “if it failed, then he would lose a job and that would keep him away from the lands of his ancestors. This was wrong for the land was his. None could tend as he could” (Ngugi, 1964: 52).

The natives of a country, a region, or other particular areas are considered as sons or daughters of such places. Thus, as a reaction to the treatment and other opportunities people can receive from those places, they ought to be grateful and useful to them as children would do to their mother; because people’s happiness lies in the relation to their land. Muthoni was right when she says to her sister Nyambura “I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know” (Ngugi, 1965: 26). By using the term “life” in this passage, the lady wants to point to existence, soul and happiness.

It is known that children’s duties towards their mother include consideration, loyalty and recognition as compliance with filial relations. In *Petals of Blood*, for instance, the filial love leads Wanja to come back to her village after a long period spent in the city. In the same vein, she redeems her grandmother’s piece of land as an expression of her loyalty to the latter. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the children of Rung’ei sing the pride of their land by saying:

Ngai has given Gikuyu a beautiful country,
Never without food or water or grazing fields.
It is good so Gikuyu should praise Ngai all the time,
For he ever been generous to them. (Ngugi, 1967: 155)

With the song mentioned above, the children show that everyone must be proud of their land and stuck on it. This pride would guide to royalty to the family land like Njoroge of whom the author says, “at least he Njoroge, would rise and fall with his country. He had nowhere to go” (Ngugi, 1964: 111). In the same context, Wanja promises, “I don’t want to forget the Old Ilmorog. I never shall forget how we lived before the Trans-Africa Road cleaved Ilmorog into two halves” (Ngugi, 1977: 323). For those characters their land (ancestral land and village) remains their root and identity. Jean Marie Adiaffi better throws lights on this idea in *The Identity Card* in which the old African Meledouman points to his land when he is asked his identity card.⁷

⁷ Everything here is my evidence and my identity card; since everything here is mine and certifies what I am, who I am. Heaven and earth. [...]
Identified by the land; that land which is under our feet, where I was born and which will be my last home [...]
(Adiaffi, 1980: 28, translation mine).
(Tout ici constitue ma preuve et ma carte d’identité. Puisque tout ici m’appartient et atteste ce que je suis, qui je suis. Le ciel et la terre. [...]
Identifié par l’histoire. Identifié par la terre, cette terre qui est sous nos pieds, qui m’a vu naître et qui sera ma dernière demeure. [...])

Conclusion

At the end of this work, we must remember that the meaning of a literary text depends on the reader who fills the role of the receiver, the discriminator and, in certain cases, of the producer who imitates or interprets polemically a work.^[8] Moreover, according to Umberto Eco, the “text presents the reader with a ‘field’ of possibilities and leaves it in large part to him or her to decide what approach to take” (Eco, 1989: x). Thanks to the signifier-signified relations and the womanist theory, we have discovered that Ngugi uses different signifiers such as words, characters, natural features and some female personal features to establish the link between land and woman.

The study also shows that the relationship between man and land falls into three different types including the filial, the emotional and illegal ones which could normally be profitable to men. Kamau therefore argues that “any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money” (Ngugi, 1964: 19). But the illegal relationship, characterized by the break of the natural order and the exploitation of the land, appears as a true problem that hampers harmony and unequal development in several regions of the world.

It is therefore recommended that people have some duties to fulfil either as a child, a husband or a third as a response to land benefits. The first and foremost duty is love which remains the warrantee of any relations in society. Frederic Nietzsche shows such social rule by saying that “[w]hatever is done out of love takes place beyond good and evil” (Nietzsche, 2002: 70). This love link amid man and land implies a good management of the land which involves protection, devout and permanent tilling. Moreover, this analysis shows that the land issues encompass both the biological and the social aspects, since the land is not only a mere passive means of people’s happiness, but also an active provider which deserves their consideration, their admiration and their assistance so as to perpetuate its benefits.

Founding on the assumption that women and land have the same value, we posit that those who consider their wives have subsequently best regards to their land and vice versa. Conversely, those who treat their wives as mere means of selfish happiness are likely to sell off their lands to foreigners.

⁸ Le lecteur est tout ensemble (ou tour à tour) celui qui occupe le rôle du récepteur, du discriminant (fonction critique fondamentale qui consiste à retenir ou à rejeter) et, dans certains cas, du producteur, imitant ou interprétant de façon polémique, une œuvre antécédente. (Hans, 1978: 12)

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